



OFFICE *of the* ATTORNEY GENERAL  
GREG ABBOTT

September 30, 2003

Ms. Michele Austin  
Assistant City Attorney  
City of Houston  
P.O. Box 1562  
Houston, Texas 77251-1562

OR2003-6884

Dear Ms. Austin:

You ask whether certain information is subject to required public disclosure under chapter 552 of the Government Code. Your request was assigned ID# 188589.

The City of Houston (the "city") received a request for the investigatory file involving a complaint filed by the requestor against a firefighter. You argue the requested information is excepted from disclosure under section 552.101 of the Government Code. We have considered the exception you claim and reviewed the submitted information.

Section 552.101 excepts from disclosure "information considered to be confidential by law, either constitutional, statutory, or by judicial decision." This exception protects information that another statute makes confidential. You raise section 552.101 in conjunction with section 143.1214 of the Local Government Code. Section 143.1214 provides in part:

(b) The department shall maintain an investigatory file that relates to a disciplinary action against a firefighter or police officer that was overturned on appeal, or any document in the possession of the department that relates to a charge of misconduct against a firefighter or police officer, regardless of whether the charge is sustained, only in a file created by the department for the department's use. The department may only release information in those investigatory files or documents relating to a charge of misconduct:

(1) to another law enforcement agency or fire department;

(2) to the office of a district or United States attorney; or

(3) in accordance with Subsection (c).

(c) The department head or the department head's designee may forward a document that relates to a disciplinary action against a firefighter or police officer to the [civil service] director or the director's designee for inclusion in the firefighter's or police officer's personnel file maintained under Sections 143.089(a)-(f) [of the Local Government Code] only if:

(1) disciplinary action was actually taken against the firefighter or police officer;

(2) the document shows the disciplinary action taken; and

(3) the document includes at least a brief summary of the facts on which the disciplinary action was based.

Local Gov't Code § 143.1214(b)-(c). You state that the submitted information relates to the investigation of allegations of misconduct by a firefighter. You inform us that this information is held in a file created by the Office of Inspector General (the "OIG") for its investigatory use, and is not held in personnel files maintained under section 143.089 of the Local Government Code. You also state that this information does not meet the conditions specified by section 143.1214(c) for inclusion in a firefighter's civil service file. *See id.* § 143.1214(c); *see also id.* § 143.089(a)-(f). Based on your representations, we conclude that the submitted information is excepted from disclosure under section 552.101 of the Government Code in conjunction with section 143.1214 of the Local Government Code as information made confidential by law. *See also* Open Records Decision No. 642 (1996) (concluding that files relating to investigations of Houston Fire Department personnel by Public Integrity Review Group of Houston Police Department were confidential under section 143.1214).

This letter ruling is limited to the particular records at issue in this request and limited to the facts as presented to us; therefore, this ruling must not be relied upon as a previous determination regarding any other records or any other circumstances.

This ruling triggers important deadlines regarding the rights and responsibilities of the governmental body and of the requestor. For example, governmental bodies are prohibited from asking the attorney general to reconsider this ruling. Gov't Code § 552.301(f). If the governmental body wants to challenge this ruling, the governmental body must appeal by filing suit in Travis County within 30 calendar days. *Id.* § 552.324(b). In order to get the full benefit of such an appeal, the governmental body must file suit within 10 calendar days. *Id.* § 552.353(b)(3), (c). If the governmental body does not appeal this ruling and the

governmental body does not comply with it, then both the requestor and the attorney general have the right to file suit against the governmental body to enforce this ruling. *Id.* § 552.321(a).

If this ruling requires the governmental body to release all or part of the requested information, the governmental body is responsible for taking the next step. Based on the statute, the attorney general expects that, within 10 calendar days of this ruling, the governmental body will do one of the following three things: 1) release the public records; 2) notify the requestor of the exact day, time, and place that copies of the records will be provided or that the records can be inspected; or 3) notify the requestor of the governmental body's intent to challenge this letter ruling in court. If the governmental body fails to do one of these three things within 10 calendar days of this ruling, then the requestor should report that failure to the attorney general's Open Government Hotline, toll free, at (877) 673-6839. The requestor may also file a complaint with the district or county attorney. *Id.* § 552.3215(e).

If this ruling requires or permits the governmental body to withhold all or some of the requested information, the requestor can appeal that decision by suing the governmental body. *Id.* § 552.321(a); *Texas Dep't of Pub. Safety v. Gilbreath*, 842 S.W.2d 408, 411 (Tex. App.—Austin 1992, no writ).

Please remember that under the Act the release of information triggers certain procedures for costs and charges to the requestor. If records are released in compliance with this ruling, be sure that all charges for the information are at or below the legal amounts. Questions or complaints about over-charging must be directed to Hadassah Schloss at the Texas Building and Procurement Commission at (512) 475-2497.

If the governmental body, the requestor, or any other person has questions or comments about this ruling, they may contact our office. We note that a third party may challenge this ruling by filing suit seeking to withhold information from a requestor. Gov't Code § 552.325. Although there is no statutory deadline for contacting us, the attorney general prefers to receive any comments within 10 calendar days of the date of this ruling.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Heather R. Rutland", written in a cursive style.

Heather R. Rutland  
Assistant Attorney General  
Open Records Division

HRR/sdk

Ref: ID# 188589

Enc: Submitted documents

c: Mr. Roger D. Anderson  
914 Sugardale Court  
Sugarland, Texas 77478  
(w/o enclosures)